## Homebrew and Fan Stories 1

### \* Homebrew

### **New Cult: The Pantheon**

The Pantheon began shortly after the Zone appeared -- the exact date is unknown, as for obvious reasons one does not take out a press release announcing one has formed a conspiracy to take over the world. But it is known that one of the first Zoners developed, as his insanity, a quite literal god complex. Specifically, he believed he was the god Loki of the extinct Norse Pantheon, and that he had been reborn to restore the worship of himself and other pagan deities.

This would have been just one more crazy Zoner, except for the fact the Zone had gifted Loki, in game terms, with Clairvoyance 5 and Mindworm 5. He used the first to locate another Zoner, an electrokinetic, and used the second to brainwash that Zoner into believing that he was Zeus, god of the sky and lightning. Loki thought he was simply awakening Zeus's true nature, due to his delusion. The two of them then tracked down another Zoner, and brainwashed her into thinking she was Isis. And another, and another ...

Each member of the Pantheon believes that he or she is the reborn version of some god or goddess from an extinct multitheistic religion. Virtually all of them are represented by now. Loki is no longer the only one with Mindworm, which increases the Pantheon's ability to "recruit". What has been gathered from deprogrammed Pantheon members is a terrifying conspiracy to take over the world. Zoners will be the rulers, nearly literal gods, and ordinary parapsychics will be their subordinates. Ordinary humans will simply be slaves.

The Pantheon's numbers are not sufficient as yet to overwhelm the NEG, much less the NEG's enemies, but they are getting there. They already possess significant influence, wealth and weaponry. They need to be stopped. Can the PCs do the job?

## **New Cult: The Yarany Hrana**

When the Mi-Go created the Nazzadi, one of the major debates among them aliens was whether or not to include crime in their culture. On the one hand, crime would weaken the Nazzadi war machine, as peculation and corruption damaged their logistics and weakened their resolve. On the other hand, without experience with crime the Nazzadi would be more vulnerable to criminal methods used by humanity during the upcoming war.

In the end, a compromise was reached. Crime was included in the Nazzadi culture, along with a dedicated criminal investigation team, but the black market was under the control of the Yarany Hrana, a criminal group modeled on the New York Mafia and Japanese Yakuza, and named after a variety of poisonous plant on the Nazzadi homeworld (in reality, the plant was as fictional as the homeworld itself). The criminal group itself was commanded by Zendo Nari, a shrewd and competent Firstborn who knew of the Nazzadi's true nature. She was tough as nails and sharp as a tack, and proved herself more than capable of controlling the dark and violent souls who gravitated into the service of organized crime.

This proved to a wise precaution, because even before the Nazzadi reached Earth assaults from lost temper, not to mention sexual abuse, were keeping the fleet's actual police force very busy. Humanity itself indeed unleashed the forces of crime on the Nazzadi, and by the time of Revelation Day the Nazzadi forces were riddled with drug addicts and blackmail victims.

After Revelation Day, Zendo Nari actually managed fairly well. She was the kind of woman who would land on top of any heap, and her lieutenants were bound to her not merely by oaths (based on a traditional honor system now revealed to be wholly artificial) but by money, favors and the tie of having committed terrible crimes together. If she had told them to join the NEG, they would have. But instead she told them to maintain their loyalty to the Mi-Go, for Zendo Nari was a firm Loyalist. They obeyed her, and got to work.

As far as common masses know, the Yarany Hrana is a conventional criminal organization that has penetrated the Nazzadi community. Extortion, illegal drugs, illegal prostitution, loan sharking, Ponzi schemes and the whole shebang of organized crime are under their purview. Independent criminal groups

are either co-opted or eliminated, and Zendo Nari and her immediate subordinates regularly top most-wanted lists. They have remained ahead of the police so far due to their vast wealth and blackmail material. While their resources in this regard are inferior to the Disciples of Death's Shadow, they make up for it by being far more organized and centralized, not to mention less erratic and less consumed with decadence.

In addition, the Yarany Hrana serve the Mi-Go. The NEG's intelligence organizations know this, but have kept it secret in order to avoid alarming the populace. The Yarany Hrana provide the Mi-Go with intelligence and sabotage as needed, their usefulness is doubled because they are not Blanks and cannot be detected. They also weaken the NEG the same way they once weakened the Nazzadi fleet, through peculation and moral infirmity, and this helps the Mi-Go. While the upper echelons are all Nazzadi, the lower ranks include many humans.

## **New Cult: The Illuminati**

For hundreds of years, "Illuminati" was the watchword of conspiracy theorists. The claim was that there was a secret society that controlled everything from world wars to terrorist attacks. Mostly the fears were focused on parochial concerns like ethnic prejudices to fears of gun-confiscation or homosexuality, and intelligent people did not take the Illuminati seriously.

They should have, because in the world of Cthulhutech the Illuminati are quite real. The goals of the Illuminati are the oldest imaginable -- power and money. Money to be used to purchase power, which would then be used to get more money. They had some inkling of the existence of sorcery and the Mythos, as did many people in the Ctech timeline, but never pursued it because they suspected the danger it posed.

It will never be known how many betrayals and atrocities of the 19th and 20th centuries can be laid at the Illuminati's feet. The Sepoy Rebellion, the rise of Hitler and then the sabotage of his regime, the maintenance of Jim Crow, the failed privatizations that followed the fall of Communism ... the list would go on and on, if anyone kept it. The only requirement to be an Illuminati member was a total contempt of the common man and the rule of law, and a ruthless desire for wealth and power at any cost so long as

someone else paid it. While a few Illuminati, such as William Randolph Hearst and Richard Cheney, have been public figures most have pulled strings from the shadows. They did not control everything, often sudden events or social movements were out of their hands. All they cared for was to take advantage of these events to make themselves richer or more influential -- nation, race and even religion were never relevant. On rare occasions one of them would be caught out for a crime, but the law was never able to touch him. Evidence would be lost and witnesses would recant, and sometimes even pardons issued -- no Illuminatus has ever been punished, though their ignorant minions on rare occasion have.

The only crack in the Illuminati's secrecy occurred in the 1960s, when a few researchers figured out what was going on. They were murdered, but the Illuminati realized that others might do the same research. Their solution was elegant -- they arranged for the publication of books describing them, but accompanied the few facts in the books with such utter garbage that no one with even a modicum of intelligence would take them seriously. Dating back to ancient Sumeria, the Cold War being fake, mind control drugs in the water supply, and similar blithering was included to make it all totally absurd. Soon the only people who took the idea of the Illuminati seriously were the kind of nuts that pose no threat to anyone except themselves. To the conspiracy's amusement, the idea even entered popular culture and had a collectible card game based on it!

But after the discovery of arcanotech, their influence began to wane. They never had any luck influencing the two new economic powers, the Ashcroft Foundation or the Chrysalis Corporation, and could not control the vast social and economic changes unleashed by the D-Engine and the nanofactory. They made vast profits off the Second Cold War, though, and were making inroads into the NUN, when the Nazzadi were sighted. This changed the Illuminati's goals from self-enrichment to survival, again no one will know the bribes and blackmails they carried out to help unite humanity in time.

After the betrayal of the Firstborn ended the First Arcanotech War, the Illuminati took stock. They knew much more than the general public about the dire state of the military situation at the end of the war, and were not caught up in general euphoria of peace. If the newly revealed Mi-Go could create one almost-victorious fleet, they could certainly build another, and another, until humanity was finally crushed (even the Illuminati did not anticipate something as drastic as the Hive Ship). The secret group decided to do what it had always done in times of struggle -- back the group it thought would win. Thus when the NEG

sent out messages to the Mi-Go asking for peace, the Illuminati embedded in the code their own message,

pledging their service to the aliens. All they asked in exchange was to be spared the Mi-Go ravages, and

to become humanity's rulers after it was conquered.

The Mi-Go accepted, and even before the Hive Ship was launched they and the Illuminati were working

together. The cabal has sabotaged the NEG's activities from behind the scenes again and again. The

Illuminati do not possess occult powers or alien technology, because they don't bother with such things.

They simply have more lawyers, guns and money than any other nongovernmental group on Earth, save

for the Ashcroft Foundation and the Children of Chaos. Not even the Death Shadows can match them in

secular power, though the Death Shadows do have much greater magical resources.

The Illuminati have prevented brilliant leaders from receiving promotions and made generals out of fools.

Their lawyers have obstructed investigations into Mi-, and their economic muscle has caused no end of

logistical nightmares. When necessary, they hire criminals through cutouts, who are cutouts themselves,

to carry out sabotage and murder. They drastically influence public opinion through their advertising

agencies and newspapers. They are a terrible threat to the world, and to any player character who gets in

their way. But no one, not even the Eldritch Society or the OIS, suspects they even exist. The Director

knows, for the Director knows all things, but has not seen fit to inform his mortal servants of them.

**Sample Illuminatus:** 

Aleksey Nikitin

Defining Characteristics: Decisive, Cruel

Experience Level: Veteran

Race: Human

Gender: Male

Allegiance: Mi-Go

Attributes: Agility 4, Intelligence 9, Perception 9, Presence 6, Strength 5, Tenacity 7

Qualities: Authority (4), Elite(4), Famous Incident (1), Shrewd, Contact (3 - See Below), Wealth (4- See

Below), Dark Secret (3-Illuminatus), Duty (3-Illuminatus), Fat, Greed, Slow

General Skills: Bureacracy 5, Business 5, Intimidate 3, Savoir-Faire 4

Combat Skills: None

Equipment: Fine Clothing, PCPU with every option installed, anything he wants

Description: Plump but not obese, he has cunning eyes that miss nothing. His voice is jovial, even when

he's planning the best way to kill you.

History: Many people in the NEG know the story of how fabulously wealthy Russian financier Aleksey

Nikitin left his arcology on vacation the day before the surprise Mi-Go attack that leveled it (the Famous

Incident in his Qualities). What none but the Illuminati know is that Aleksey not only had been warned by

his Mi-Go masters that the attack was coming, but had arranged for the gaps in sensor coverage that let

the attack be a surprise to begin with. As for his wife who was killed -- she'd gotten too old to be

attractive, and there were plenty more prettier girls.

Since fleeing he has continued his work, his specific duties involve damaging the NEG's economy and

financial system in every way possible. Thanks to him the Central Bank is a mess, the stock market is

unpredictable, and the less said about the commodities prices the better. These acts may seem trivial, but

they do major damage the NEG war effort by hurting the economy that pays for the military and the

intelligence efforts of the Aeon War. A mecha that never gets built due to budget constraints is one less

mecha facing the Mi-Go, after all. An inferior warship design, adopted because of shortages of the

materials that would allow better performance, is that many more casualties when the ship is destroyed.

His Wealth 4 and Contacts 3 are what the general public believes he possesses. His wealth and

connections as an Illuminatus are much greater -- asking what he can afford is like asking what Bill Gates

can afford. Whatever he wants to. In addition, other Illuminati will help him as he needs it. Assume that if

its for sale, he can buy it. If its not for sale, he can pay someone to steal in for him.

He has no combat skills whatsoever, but he is constantly accompanied by four veteran bodyguards/counterspies, with the very latest in equipment and the finest of training, as well as two security sorcerers equally skilled. They all know Nikitin is an Illuminatus who serves the Mi-Go, and are traitors to humanity as well, and will kill without hesitation. That's just personal combat -- an Illuminatus buys violence like most people buy groceries, and Nikitin can afford any criminal he needs to carry out sabotage, assault or assassination.

In addition, the Mi-Go know Nikitin is a valuable asset and are willing to expend resources to protect him. If the characters have a tape of Nikitin committing a crime, and are flying to another arcology to deliver it to someone, the Mi-Go may send mecha to intercept them. If they have stolen a Peek from him, the Mi-Go may activate Blanks to kill them. On the other hand, if the Mi-Go know Nikitin has been utterly compromised they will devote even more resources to killing him and those of his employees who know about the Illuminati, in order to preserve the larger network.

Using him: Nikitin is intended to be a mastermind, the puppeteer rather than the puppet. He has no ability to do battle, but if the adventure has progressed to the point where the characters are facing him directly, with knowledge of what he is, either the game has gone seriously off track or they have revealed his operations. Even if Nikitin cannot lead them up the line to the rest of the Illuminati, each full member of the Illuminati is such a dangerous individual, and does so much damage, that defeating even one is a noteworthy accomplishment.

#### Illuminati Rumors to spark campaigns:

- ❖ A reporter has figured out the Illuminati -- knowing he cannot simply reveal them or they will suppress the story, he is making plans to murder them, one by one.
- The lower ranks of the Illuminati have figured out that their masters now serve the Mi-Go. Instead of sparking them to revolt and destroy the Illuminati, this has sparked them to plan an internal coup, so that they can rule humanity after the Mi-Go's victory.

❖ A few Illuminati believe that the Mi-Go may not win, and are planning to double-cross the Mi-Go and serve either the cults or the NEG, claiming that this was their plan all along.

## **New Cult: Conspiracy Terrorists**

When arcane theory was developed, along with the associated technologies once deemed impossible, most people hailed it as a triumph of science. But one group claimed that free energy and antigravity was older, and had been around for a century. These "conspiracy theorists" were believers in massive plots to keep humanity enslaved by a power elite, and that everything -- the 9/11 attacks, the world wars, everything, was all planned out decades in advance. They had been claiming for decades that there were secret technologies and that psionic power was real -- and here was the proof, the Illuminati/Bilderbergers/Trilateral Commission had simply decided to make these technologies public. Indeed, conspiracy theory became very popular in the 2040s and 2050s. All that was missing was the NUN -- always a focus of conspiracy nuts -- to dissolve the world's governments and take over.

Then, of course, that happened to. To the masses, it was a necessary step to fight the aliens. To conspiracy theorists, it was proof that they had been predicting the future. They came to the conclusion the Nazzadi upper echelons and the human upper echelons were working together, to establish rulership over both species. This was of course, crazy -- but something like it actually happened, on Revelation Day.

Revelation Day was the critical moment that transformed conspiracy theory to conspiracy terrorism. Everything the conspiracy theorists feared had come to pass, the only thing to do was fight. Unlike the rigidly controlled Blood Brigade, which targets civilians, the typical conspiracy terrorist is a lone wolf, recruited through word of mouth or by reading banned books. He or she focuses on assassination of political and military elites, since attacking civilians (which the supposed Illuminati don't care about) is a pointless endeavor.

### **New Cult: Hunting Clubs**

The Aeon War may well prove to be the end of humanity as humanity recognizes itself now. For all the NEG's distractions and propaganda, this cannot be totally hidden from the population, and many people have thrown themselves into extreme hedonism, seeking out ever greater thrills in the short time they may have left. Before an arcology falls, many will refuse evacuation and engage in decadent partying rather than save their own lives. Middle class families blow their life savings in a weekend of being waited on hand and foot -- what the rich are doing does not bear mentioning.

The NEG's law enforcement does not care about this, much. It is busy with other things, such as the sudden rise in street crime. But one particular pleasure has become dangerously prevalent -- hunting. Some of the hunters go out into the war zones to hunt down mecha or monsters, and the NEG doesn't mind this. But a few of them are going after a prey less dangerous but available in greater quantities -- other humans.

Hunting clubs will kidnap people, take them outside the arcologies, let them loose, and hunt them down like animals. This is common enough that the NEG has had to pass laws specifically addressing it, which is terrifying in and of itself. In their early formation clubs will take anyone, but most people in the ultra-urbanized world of 2087 don't have the skills to give enough of a thrill. So they begin to take more dangerous people to hunt, like police officers, soldiers, parapsychics -- and PCs.

## **Garber Home for the Gifted**

Adolescents, and even children, with parapsychic powers are a problem ordinary schools and parents simply can't deal with. While the most obvious problems arise from Environmental powers, Somatic and Manipulation powers present their own issues. How to deal with a cheater who steals answers from other students minds,or mentally controls the teacher to ignore disciplinary issues? Even Sensory powers present terrible issues with blackmail. For that reason, every arcology has several institutions like the Garber Home for the Gifted.

The Garber Home for the Gifted is a boarding school for those with parapsychic abilities. According to NEG propaganda, it is a second home where the students learn to use their talents for the eventual good of society -- and there is, indeed, a genuine attempt by the administrators and staff to make it so. Certainly it looks like such a place.

But appearances can deceive. Most obviously, the Garber Home for the Gifted keeps on premises a staff of power-armored troopers ready to deal with Burning students, and they have authorization to restrain, or even kill, if there are no other options. In addition to their normal academic work, students are required to pass regular psych evaluations, and there are sensors all about to prevent them from using their abilities undetected. Using abilities outside approved times and places, or in unapproved ways, can bring harsh punishments that would never be allowed to ordinary students. The NEG understands that cosmic powers and rituals are useful, and even necessary if it wants to win the Aeon War, but it still fears them and by extension their practitioners. The propaganda that permeates all of NEG society is especially directed at them, in order for them to enter public service or even the military upon reaching adulthood.

All of this is on top of normal adolescent and childhood power games and anxieties. In addition, the most common cause of eruptions of parapsychic ability among youngsters is abuse, so many "students" at the Garber Home have serious psychological issues to boot.

The Garber Home can be used as a background element, or a source of threats (imagine a teenage queen bee with Magnetism, or a bully with Pyrokinesis). They are teenagers, but teenagers with access to abilities beyond the norm, and unlike the X-men they aren't well adjusted. A whole campaign could be done at the school, with the PCs as students, by a particularly ambitious gaming group.

#### **Rumors:**

- The Garber Home is actually a front for a government program training para-psychic infiltrators and super soldiers, the graduating classes are often employed in a shadow war with the Pantheon.
- The Garber Home is run by the Dagonites as a way to recruit para-psychics for their breeding programs.

❖ In a special underground dormitory, the Garber Home houses unusual para-psychics whose abilities go beyond what the public knows about para-psychology, people capable of implanting seeds of themselves into another person's mind to slowly take it over, psychics who can link with Migou, powerful burners, and at least one who can manifest Fourth Order powers.

## New Merit: Conditional parapsychic power

This was inspired by Terrence See of the Vorkosigan saga, who is a telepath but needs drugs to activate his power. In Cthulhutech, a conditional parapsychic is one whose powers require some external condition to work. The condition must be something that is difficult to satisfy to qualify for the Merit -- the need to say "Shazam!" does not count. How much the condition decreases the Merit's cost depends on how onerous the condition is. This can be combined with the "Limited parapsychic potential" post of Looks\_Also\_Into\_You.

#### Examples include:

- ❖ An oracle who can see the future -- so long as she is on a specific island.
- ❖ A drug that is used up with each power use, and which is carried around in easily-breakable vials to boot.
- ❖ A telepath whose abilities only work on men -- women are immune.
- ❖ The character must not have any Wounds -- or must have at least one Wound.

# **Pop Culture Blurbs**

This is a repost from the old boards. It is a series of blurbs about pop culture in 2087.

**Popstra music:** The fusion of popular music and orchestral music, this genre has the lyrics and rhythms of pop, rock and jazz -- but the large playing groups of orchestra music. Twenty band members is typical, and thirty or even forty is not unknown. It dominates the charts in 2086.

**<u>Fashion:</u>** With the daring fashions for both men and women in the strange aeon body art has risen to a new level of prominence. Body paint is quickly becoming an essential element when dressing to impress,

at least among baseline humans. However given the temporary nature of body paint it's generally an after market add on, and matching a paint job to an outfit is vital, the payoff however is being able to wear the season's latest hits without worrying about a rival showing up in an identical get up since the right paint work can make an entirely different beast out of any dress or suit.

<u>The New Prequels:</u> Following George Lucas's death in 2023, his family found notes for extensive revisions and alterations to what his diary referred to as the "impulsive" scripts for the Star Wars prequels. In the period between the Arcanotech Wars these were adapted into the "New Prequels". No greenscreens or models were used. Rather the Jedi and Sith were all played by real para-psychics, the chase and racing scenes used actual antigravity vehicles, and the space battle scenes were shot in actual outer space. It was a staggering success, and the original prequels are now relegated to the dustbin of history.

**The Viga Awards:** In 2087, video games are considered an art form equal to literature, movies, and TV shows and the Viga Awards are the equivalent of the Emmys and Oscars. They receive equal billing on the major networks, with the same hoopla. Game designers are as important as actors and actresses.

<u>True Definition Television (TDTV):</u> The standard television in 2087 produces images so sharp and clear viewers literally cannot tell them from reality, only the fact the picture is on a wall indicates anything is different. It is considered the furthest 2D can go. Engineers have the ability to produce higher resolution, and do so for scientific imaging equipment, but there is no point in doing so for commercial use.

Special effects are much cheaper in 2087, due to massive advances in computer imaging technology and due to nanoforges to make costumes and sets. A "low-grade B movie", of the sort Asylum pictures puts out today, has production values equivalent to a 2014 tent-pole movie. What the tent-pole movies look like is simply incredible to view. The only "limit" on what can be done is the artistic vision of the creators -- which, as today, is often lacking.

Altrel fiction: In the 2040s, science fiction was facing an existential crisis in that most of what it had predicted -- energy weapons, space colonies, antigravity, and a world government -- had actually happened. The solution was to rebrand the science fiction genre as the alternate reality genre. Now no pretense is made that sci-fi represents any kind of "future".

<u>Superheroes:</u> The superhero genre has fallen on hard times. During the first Arcanotech War all comic book companies reworked their superhero stories into parables justifying the extermination of the Nazzadi at the behest of the NEG. When the Nazzadi were revealed to be pawns of the Mi-Go, the backlash doomed superhero comics for good. While graphic novels still exist, the old superheros are gone.

While the archetypal superhero comic is pretty much a dead genre, one champion of the DCU is seeing major success: Jonah Hex. Considered too minor a character to get into the war propaganda for the first Arcanotech war, and marketed as a retro-style Cowboy hero for several years following the debacle DC comics has managed to get by, albeit much reduced. The more fantastic elements have slowly been readded to the comics as time goes on, but much care has been taken to keep Jonah Hex very much a Cowboy.

Marvel went a different direction. They've taken to buying the stories of real occult investigations from various private investigators, and making comic book versions of those events (with details altered to protect those involved). Even a few government services such as the police or the more specialized agencies will sell a story or two on occasion.

**RPGs, Wargames and LARPs:** Role playing games are much more mainstream in 2087. There are some major differences -- D&D has removed the Drow as being too close to the NAzzadi, for example. Being an rpg writer pays well, if one does it well. I admit there is some wish fulfillment here.

In 2043 The Adventures of Derpy Hooves concluded with the 5th season Finale. Many fans were saddened, but with her Epic quest concluded the show creators decided to focus on remaking the Original MLP:FiM for 3D projectors, and on their 6th spin off series Snips and Snails on Rails, detailing the adventures of young adult Snips and Snails as they travel Equestria and beyond with a hoof made locomotive.

The current trend in RPGs leans toward Steam Punk as both sword and sorcery and sci-fi tend to be a tad too real for the modern escapist. Beware of goggle wearing basement dwellers, they are just chomping at the bit to talk long and hard about their 4th tier Gremlin Clank Jockeys or their 6th tier Jaeger Blast Knights.

Historical and Modern Wargaming are undergoing a resurgence, aided by the use of 3d projections to eliminate the need for expensive, looseable, breakable figurines and to speed up movement and overall play. Many regions treat such games with the same seriousness as chess, and many tournaments are held in a variety of formats. Several agencies including the military scout such competitions looking for potential officer talent.

One of the cultural aspects of the false history crafted for the Nazzadi that persists to this day is the Tok'di or game pack. A deck of cards divided into 5 suites of 12 cards each (0-9 and two 'face' cards) and 5 6-sided dice (though some come with a spare die just to fill the box and keep it from rattling).

The Nazzadi 'culture' provided by the migou included games with both dice and cards, and the most popular were those that included both so the dice and cards were generally produced and sold together as part of a set. Humans pounced on the idea, in fact they had learned the rules to several games and began producing variations before the war was over.

To this day many Nazzadi enthusiasts do not like to speak of the first inter-racial Yotoki (Imagine something akin to poker but based on your die rolls you can influence the game a bit, and exchanging cards costs die rolls, adding another dimension to the cost-benifit calculations and the bluffing) tournament, seeing as the winner was not only human but the final table was completely devoid of Nazzadi, to make matters worse they had been using a Nazzadi variation of the game rather than the 'official' rules or any of the terran variations developed from mistranslations/incomplete knowledge of the rules

The combination of cards and dice is so versatile that many games have been developed for the pack since, including games that use the dice as meeples and the cards to create a game board, an RPG, and what's known as reverse strip poker. Reverse strip poker originated as a joke amongst Nazzadi, deriding human nudity taboos. The players begin naked with a pile of silly, heavy, ill-fitting, itchy clothes, and as the game progresses the losers of each hand have to don apparel from the pile selected by the winner of the hand.

<u>Nazzadi Pop Culture:</u> The Nazzadi brought with them from their "homeworld" vast databases of popular culture and art, most of which is frankly pretty boring. This is because it was all artificially created by the Mi-Go to give greater verisimilitude to their deception, and the Mi-Go have only the barest idea of what

pop culture and art even are, much less any ability to produce quality versions of it. A small fraction of the art and pop culture is however very, very good. How this happened was a mystery for many years until the discovery of the braincases on Yuggoth -- the bad art was created by the Mi-Go themselves, and the good art was created by braincased slaves who were desperate for something to do.

### **Sports in the Strange Aeon**

Sports have a power over the panhuman mind. Witness the cheering crowds, the intense loyalties, the pride people take in wins and losses alike. Knowing this, the designers of the arcologies included for each one a number of stadiums for organized athletic competition, from races to all kinds of football. There is even an government department, the Ministry of Games and Sport, that handles leagues and organizes schedules (it's a sub department of the propaganda organization).

There are some differences from the past, however. For one thing, advancements in sports medicine, and the advent of medical sorcery, has drastically reduced injuries and made it possible for players who once would have retired in their thirties to play well into their fifties. The same advances make combat sports guilt free, and martial arts competitions are very popular in the 2080s. Precise laser sensors are used in place of fallible referees, so that miscalls are almost unknown. College athletes are paid what their services are worth, another huge change from the past.

Another change was made possible by the advent of gravity control. The ability to produce rooms of zero or reduced gravity has opened up exciting possibilities for sport. Some of these originated on the offworld bases, as colonists seeking to compete against each other found that the changed gravity let them make thrilling moves impossible on Earth, and in turn these new sports found their way home. Others were created solely on Earth by marketers seeking to sell gear and found new franchises.

There are also the "new" Nazzadi sports such as thraka and mariti. The Nazzadi sports were created by the Mi-go both to give verisimilitude to the deception and to keep Nazzadi fit, and they made sure to include in the original invasion fleet many who had been programmed to enjoy playing and viewing these

games. In addition, they found human fans because they are, in fact, quite fun! (In reality, they are extinct sports from Earth that the Mi-Go copied, based on their long observation of mankind.)

Like most things in the Strange Aeon, however, sport comes with a darker side. Humanity has thrown itself into sports for the same reason it has into pop culture and fashion -- it wants to enjoy what little time it may well have left. Overzealous fans take extreme measures to manipulate outcomes, as do players. Vast sums change hands over the games, as gambling both legal and illegal goes on, and many are impoverished. Finally, the Disciples of Death's Shadows sponsor bloody gladiatorial fights to the death.

#### Here are some sport-related adventure ideas:

- ❖ A rogue arcanotech researcher has developed an extract, made from the body of Byakhees he summoned and ambushed, that makes him physically capable of competing in martial arts competitions but cannot be detected by conventional testing. But it has also produced in him a taste for human flesh -- and other Byakhees are trying to find him, seeking revenge for their kin.
- The characters are assigned to track down a security breach. The actual spy is the grav-car racing husband of a top general, who gives data his husband leaves around the hab to the Mi-Go in exchange for superior engine tuning that lets him defeat his competitors.
- ❖ The 2088 Olympics are coming up -- but the Blood Brigade sees the event as a tempting target, while the Yarany Hrana are attempting to rig the events in order to make money off the gambling.

# **Gulches**

Gulches are self-sufficient communities independent of the NEG's infrastructure, made possible by free energy and nanotech manufacturing. They take their name from "Galt's Gulch", a community in a mid-20th century fictional\philosophical work titled Atlas Shrugged. In the book the world's rich people all abandon society and take up residence in Galt's Gulch -- without millionaires to do their thinking for them, the government collapses. For obvious reasons, this philosophy enjoyed great success among rich people in the later parts of the 20th and early parts of the 21st century. To 2086 sensibilities it seems self-

evident the main protagonist, John Galt, is an avatar of Nylarahotep. However, in the absence of definitive proof the book has not been proscribed.

Gulches began to appear in the 2040s, after D-Engines were reliable enough to permit their existence. Many were built in remote and inaccessible places, only reachable by antigravity. The nanoforges of the day, while far less powerful and versatile than what would come later, were able to produce food, water, building materials and consumer goods for the inhabitants. The reasons to move to a gulch were complicated. Some were libertarians, who wanted to set up communities that modeled the fictional Galt's Gulch. Others were cults -- not Mythos cults, but ordinary charisma cults who saw setting up these communities as a way to live life uninhibited by the mores of the wider community. Still others simply wanted to live the adventure. And many were afraid the developing Second Cold War would turn hot, and wanted to be in a place away from where the bombs were likely to land. Still there was a sharp drop in living standards associated with a gulch, and only the ideologically motivated were willing to even try it.

During the First Arcanotech War, both the NEG and the Nazzadi ignored the gulches, judging them to have no military value. For this reason, many refugees started up gulches for a place to live. Advances in nanotechnology also meant that living standards had risen enough to make them much more comfortable. After Revelation Day, a new category of gulch arose -- the marikini. This Nazzadi word means "refuge", and referred to gulches inhabited by Nazzadi who were not Loyalist, but still rejected the NEG and wanted to live as they always had. By the time the Hive Ship was sighted there were 1923 registered gulches across the planet, and an estimated 800 more not on any records.

When Migou attacked, and the Dagonites revealed themselves, the two groups saw the gulches as conveniently undefended sources of Blanks and rape victims, respectively. Two thirds of the gulches were either wiped out or abandoned for safer arcologies in the first six months of the Aeon War, and many of the remaining ones have suffered the same fate since. The hundred or so gulches that remain are, however, inhabited by the most fanatical inhabitants and are well-concealed and defended.

The NEG still defends the gulches when it can spare some local resources. They are inhabited by panhumans, and the NEG bases its legitimacy on defending panhumanity from the mythos. For all its faults

the NEG doesn't want to abandon people, and being a democracy it responds to public opinion. Hence the gulches can appear in adventures!

#### Here are some adventure ideas:

- ❖ Mecha game: The characters are shot down over enemy territory, but by chance a gulch finds them first. While this helps the characters in one respect, their arrival brings long-buried tensions in the gulch out into the open. Some residents want to get the PCs back to the NEG, but others want to kill them to prevent them from accidentally revealing the gulch's location. The characters must tread a careful path.
- ❖ Law enforcement game: Two eleven-year old girls arrive at the character's arcology, barely alive after hundred kilometer trek to find refuge. They tell a horrendous tale of how their gulch has been taken over by a criminal gang that robs, murders and rapes at will, and carry with them recordings that prove their story is true. Public outcry forces the NEG to send an armed party to the gulch, including the PCs, to punish the guilty and restore the rule of law. But the criminals know the legal system well, and have thoroughly intimidated the innocent inhabitants.
- ❖ Eldritch Society game: A gulch founded by a trillionaire as his personal fief contains his private collection of unique minerals and gems -- some of which, unbeknownst to him, possess powerful mystical properties both the Eldritch Society and the Chrysalis Corporation greatly desire. Things quickly devolve into a three-way struggle between Tagers, Dhohanoids and a power-armor equipped private army!
- Mecha Game: A major raid is planned against Dagonite positions, but a small gulch that the NEG knows about, and the Dagonites don't, is near the planned battlefield. It will surely be destroyed in the conflict, so a group, including the PCs, is sent to quietly evacuate it. Yet many inhabitants refuse to leave, thinking it a trick by a government they don't trust and have rejected. The PCs must find some way to deal with them without causing such a commotion the Dagonites catch on, ruining the advantage of surprise in the coming attack.

- ❖ Law Enforcement Game: A new and nasty drug has hit the streets of the group's arcology, and the money trail eventually leads to a nearby gulch. It develops that the gulch desperately needs cash to purchase medical equipment and replacement parts for their D-Engine, and only turned to crime when all legitimate options for raising funds had been tried. What will the characters do?
- ❖ Eldritch Society Game: A mortal in the Chrysalis Corporation has fled the evil to a gulch, and has taken with him data files that implicate the Chrysalis Corporation in political corruption as an insurance policy. Unfortunately, this has the opposite effect from what he intended. The poor soul is now pursued both by Dhohanoids who want the files back, and by the Eldritch Society which has sent the PCs to get the documents first.

## Expanded NEG history, a rough draft

As the first quarter of the 21st century drew to a close, mankind could be excused for thinking that it was, in some way, finally getting things right. The New United Nations was a self-sufficient and efficient organization, and had done much to reduce war, famine and poverty in the developing world while maintaining peace in the developed one. A new international peacekeeping force had been created, which had done much to fight the scourges of modern slavery, drug trafficking and tax evasion. There was a permanent base on the moon, and the new hydrogen and solar technologies were slowing the rate of carbon emissions. Even China and the Middle East had become much more liberal, though they were not yet full democracies. Most of all, humanity remained ignorant of its true insignificance among the greater powers of the universe.

Then, over the course of the 2030s, things began to come apart. The creation of arcane theory produced radical new technologies, such as free energy, gravity control, nanotech manufacturing and mecha. Any one of these technologies would have been immensely disruptive, as massive corporations and millions of workers found themselves obsolete almost overnight. Together their effect was magnified, to the point where the world economy did not so much collapse as evaporate. While a few nations, such as the US and Russia, were able to successfully make the transition to a sociocapitalistic economy the vast majority

were not. Nation after nation either fell into anarchy as their governments could not afford to pay for basic functions, or embraced fervent nationalism in order to maintain stability.

When the dust settled the result was Cold War 2, as two power blocs feuded for influence in Africa and South America while producing massive armies, navies and WMD forces for an eventual confrontation that could well destroy the world. Had the Mi-Go done nothing at all, it is likely humanity would have wiped out civilization, and possible all terrestrial life on Earth, totally without help. But on August 11, 2053, everyone on Earth with even a hint of sensory psychic ability collapsed into a twitching mess. When they recovered from their seizures, they reported that a decision had been made, a decision that would bring about a horrid war that neither side would win.

After Revelation Day, it would be known that the terrible decision was that of the Mi-Go, to create the Nazzadi. Both the NUN and its rival, the Riyadh Alliance, assumed they would fight. Both sides stepped back from the brink of war, and began feelers to end Cold War 2. Over the next few years they would stop supporting proxy civil wars and rebuild the shattered developing world, and it looked like things were getting better once again. Then in 2058, the Nazzadi fleet was sighted was astronomers – and the true nature of the seizures in 2053 became clear. There was an alien invasion coming! No one thought that the newcomers were peaceful – not after the precognitive flash. Also, telepaths, now that they had something to focus on, were able to scan the Nazzadi fleet at great effort and reported billions were coming, with military discipline and hostile intent. This was no colonization or trading fleet, but an army bent on conquest.

What followed was an unprecedented level of diplomatic work, as the nations of Earth made preparations to cooperate against the common enemy. Some agreements, such as a global educational system and patent system and universal currency, that would have taken decades to work out in normal times were resolved in a few weeks – they were rough and had holes, but they existed. Other agreements which previously no one had even attempted, such as unification of military and intelligence agencies and a standardized criminal justice system, came to be mere months. To the Mi-Go, this was alarming. They had counted on humanity's factionalism and selfishness to keep it from fighting the Nazzadi with its full potential, and had created a smaller fleet their worst-case scenarios called far in order to get the invasion

started faster. Now they were going up against a somewhat-united planet, something their plans had not taken into account.

The First Arcanotech war lasted a brutal half-decade. Neither side gave or asked for quarter, and what the Mi-Go had expected to be a short, victorious war dragged on and on. But while militarily the Nazzadi made slow progress, morally they were falling to pieces. Hole after hole was appearing in the fiction. Prisoners and captured libraries had revealed to Earth Nazzadi history, which was full of gaps, inconsistencies and outright copying of Earth's history. Even many of the black-skinned aliens, reading their own history and comparing it to Earth, knew something was up. Had it not been for the many suspiscious Nazzadi, Revelation Day would never have taken hold. But when it did, and the truth was revealed, the First Arcanotech War came to and end, with – as had been prophesied, neither side winning.

The post-war political situation was — muddled, to say the least. The nations of Earth had come together in something like brotherhood, and former enemies had fought and suffered side by side. When President Ryoko Fujiwara declared her intent to form a world government, citing the threat of the newly revealed Mi-Go and the need to rebuild the ravaged Earth, she did so with the support of the Nazzadi, the military, the intelligence services and the general population. She called it the New Earth Government, or the NEG.

# **The Organic Extension**

This is why the Cthulhutech universe never went cyberpunk -- it was "inspired" by the Interface Zero game, in the sense that I read it and thought "why isn't CTech like this?".

Evolution takes advantage of whatever is there. In our reality, it means that cells are chemical, thermodynamic and nanophysical marvels in their every aspect. Read any book on biology, and one will be awed at the sheer delicacy and robustness of cellular division, infection, and metabolism. And that is just individual cells! The way they communicate, get together into organs, the ability of evolution to produce the eye and the hand -- beyond remarkable.

In the Cthulhutech universe, where the higher dimensions beyond of the World of Elements exist, evolution has "learned" to take advantage of these as well. All nervous systems (some arcanoscientists believe whole ecosystems) have an evolved connection to these higher energies, known as the organic extension. Sentient beings have the most, and this organic extension, combined with the sheer processor power of the massively complex brain, is what makes all decision-making possible. It also is the source of ritual magic and psychic ability, and the origin of the Operator Extension Side Effect that makes mecha nonfictional. It must be emphasized that the organic extension is not any kind of a "soul". It does not survive death, as far as arcanoscientists know.

But while this connection involves a linkage to the higher energies of the universe allows for amazing possibilities, it closes off others. To produce a brain-machine interface is impossible -- the organic extension won't let you. Even simple cybernetic prosthetics are prohibitively complex to design, even if one needed them given that the Ctech universe has organ generation and limb regrowth. Finally, it makes true AI impossible -- the organic extension is the source of decision making ability, and computers without it are inherently limited to following programming. They can seem to hold conversations, and they can certainly carry out computations, but that is the limit.

Where do LAIs fit into this? Well, LAIs are the product of a very limited artificial orgonic extension, which is not sufficient for true intelligence or understanding arcane science but which still permits them to manage infrastructure and the Internet far better than any human. Indeed, a major use of LAIs is to write software for "mere" computers -- in the Ctech universe, programs never freeze up or conflict.

As for Mi-Go brain technology, such as blanking and artificial memories, the aliens do possess sufficient knowledge of the organic extension, and the panhuman brain, to pull off tricks like memory reprogramming, but at great expense of time and expertise. The NEG is nowhere near the level of being able to do that. They can control the Engels, but that is a simple instinctual connection, far below the level of the intellect.

### Fan Stories

Because we need more than the official story books to know the world has turned into a shitty and weird place.

### **Engel Love**

The next wave wasn't expected until nightfall. All soldiers were expected to sleep through most of the day.

That his Engel projected feelings of contentment when he slept inside it gave him a convenient excuse to do so.

Mark Tanner had been chosen to pilot an Engel through a semi-experimental program to find humans that were both suitable for Engel usage... and an almost inhuman amount of tenacity to cling to what most people called normalcy. It appeared that the NEG was taking some initiative to increase the lifespan of their Engel pilots; after all, you can't win a war when your best and brightest are locked up and, for lack of a better term, batshit insane.

As he scratched his upper lip and looked into the morning sky (and found it odd that he felt the sun being behind a cloud at the moment was portentous...), he found himself being drawn to his memories of past times he got into the very same cockpit; he sniffed in disdain when he imagined it was neatly-packaged exposition for some unseen observer. When he first climbed into the Seraph's cockpit cavity, he was frankly unnerved, not by the sudden uptick of empathic feedback from his new partner, but from a feeling of warmth and a sudden release from loneliness from the cybernetic behemoth. The second time was a field test, and a chance to stretch the Seraph's legs. She'd performed very well, and he remarked at how fast the response time was. Again, he was caught off-guard when the Engel seemed pleased that...he'd been pleased...

It wasn't until much later in active duty that he'd heard that his particular Seraph had been used and reused in service as the pilots went slowly insane; after each new attunement, the cybernetic beast had improved. Subsequent pilots remarked at how fast 'she' complied with their thoughts, to the point where young Mark began to think it was starting to anticipate his own thoughts before he finished them. He shook himself from his impromptu stroll down memory lane, reminding himself of the need to be prepared for another push from the bugs.

So here he was: one man. Hundreds of miles from his family and friends - and permanently removed from a girl he...once knew (damned Mi-Go...), inside of an alien being whom he'd named Gwendolyn (because, even after a fair amount of research, he didn't know of any feminine angel names...and besides which, he liked the sound). Rather, he was inside an alien being that was, according to his (admittedly nutty) predecessors, "thinking" increasingly human.

He thought a soothing greeting to the monster, and was given a response that had no words, but was indeed close to "welcome". After a few moments of companionable silence, both real and psychic, he idly began to stroke her walls; she answered with an emotion that seemed to incorporate "that feels nice", "keep going", and something else, instead of words, put him in the mind of an overlarge dog, simply wagging its tail. A sort of dialogue sprang between them. "Image of pilot, uninjured, healthy, content?" "Image of pilot, uninjured, healthy, okay. Image of Gwendolyn, uninjured, healthy, content?" "Image of Gwendolyn, uninjured, healthy, content."

Telepathic small talk does not translate well to speech.

A half-hour in which he, through a punch-drunk lack of sleep, tried to make small talk about the weather, food, and the other Engels passed. Over that half-hour, he was reminded that his Engel was indifferent to biting cold, that it was fed intravenously through a series of tubes, that she had no real means of communicating other than through her pilot, and that Engels kept their own company. Finally, Mark fell asleep. His self-imposed "polite conversation" time with his Engel was fulfilled, and they'd already had a long night with last night's larger-than-expected wave of bugs.

Three things were going to happen in the next twenty-four hours that no one knew about. One: a withdrawal of Mi-Go forces in the area to fend off the more active cults of the Nameless One. Two: the first recorded instance of an Engel communing with a pilot while he slept. Three: the first, if unrecorded, instance of an Engel developing a genuine sapience.

Normally, Mark Tanner did not dream. When he did, it always included, at least once, finches with the heads of hippos or another patently absurd beast. Typically as a creature that was part of the zoo that his harem of improbably beautiful and curvaceous women took care of. So it was odd that he felt himself laying on a somewhat spongy floor, in the dark, and alone.

After a small amount of blindly bumbling around in the dark, an indistinct blob made itself known in front of himself, quickly taking on a (admittedly general) human shape. Finally noting that this was one of those rare lucid dreams, Mark prepared himself to run as the figure walked toward him. As it neared,

he prepared to take another step back, but felt something root him to the spot.

His legs, nearly halfway to the knees, had sunk into the invisible floor, and the floor was rising. Interestingly, the figure began to take on sharper contrast as it came closer, individual features shaping themselves out of blurry gray, some beginning to show color. The figure, too, seemed to remain eye-toeye with him, and its legs remained totally visible, even as the floor stopped rising somewhere around his waist. It was then that he saw what the figure was slowly becoming.

And, as anyone with a grasp of romantic stereotypes will tell you, it was his dead girlfriend: black skin with Caucasian features, softly glowing red eyes, cute little fangs, and a name: Kory.

He opened his mouth to speak, but she silenced him with a finger against his lips. It was at this point that her image became slightly blurry at the edges...and...and the newly re-sharpened image resumed walking towards him...and simply put his head against her bosom and gave a gentle hug.

While he wasn't able to see what was happening to himself, he could certainly feel a delicious friction pick up. A lucid dream was a novelty for him, but he hadn't made whatever was enclosing his dick rotate one way, then the other, switching at random intervals.

It was an odd feeling, having your hair stroked by a dead woman, who began letting out delightful little mewls and moans, as though she were riding him instead of merely hugging him: his cock was somewhere below her snatch, but she acted as though she were getting a nice, slow lovemaking. And she guided his head down to a nipple, and, he obligingly sucked and bit at it. The whole dream seemed to fuzz and lose cohesion for a split second, before returning to focus, but even after it had done so, everything was just short of having razor-sharp clarity. The woman he was sucking at started to breathe harder. A girl he only thought occasionally thought of, being immobilized up to the waist, and much slower sex than he regularly fantasized about? He'd long since put together that this was not wholly his own dream.

Doubly so since whoever was on the other end had a lactation fetish. And it tasted too good to be real. This begged a question- his torso was mashed into her leaking tits while her mouth caught his in a hungry kiss. That train of thought was going to have to wait. The foot-long tongue had precedence. She first wrapped his own tongue with hers, completely encasing it, before alternating licking around his whole mouth and cocooning his tongue again, massaging it with waves of her own muscle. She only stopped when it became obvious he was out of breath. This further sealed the deal for him: who needed to breath in a dream? Was he somehow sleepwalking? The immobilized legs answered "no". At least, about the "walking" part. So what was going on...?

The girl released him and walked backwards a small way before turning away from him and bending over at the waist, exposing her pussy, eager and dripping, almost mimicking the nectar leaking from her breasts. She made eye contact by looking between her thighs at the man she'd just claimed. Mark looked at her helplessly, still waist-deep in...something. That was when he noticed something: his attention was so focused on the not-Kory that he'd neglected to notice there was a second woman in here. Even before he got a good look, he felt her arms, which had encircled his waist move down to his rear and give a firm squeeze. A human, she looked just like the cute little red-headed and lightly freckled support arcanotechnician that came to the front lines to try to see if the Mi-Go, well known to hate the assorted magic-using cults with slightly more fervor than humanity at large, were unusually weak or resistant to sorcery.

Except that Jane hadn't had boobs bigger than her head. Or prehensile hair. Or a smoldering look that could've made a gay man think twice. The fact that she appeared directly behind him, stuck her tongue in his ear, and started pushing him toward the now-gushing-from-two-tits-and-a-pussy nazzadi woman who was offering herself to him only served to distract him.

As he came slowly and inexorably closer to the black-skinned woman, it seemed as though her pussy stretched out toward him, puckering and quivering. His thoughts were confirmed a moment later, when he was swallowed by her pussy when he was still a good half-foot away from her hips, making a squelching sound and trying to suck him deeper. As he entered the nazzadi woman from behind, the overlarge breasts of the human woman smooshed into his back. The whole of the dream blurred yet again, but to a smaller degree this time, and when both the nazzadi and human women shuddered, not only at the same time, but also in the same fashion...well, he'd heard about magic being able to influence dreams, but who would be such a dedicated pervert to risk their sanity for this?

As he began thrusting into the nazzadi below him, the whole dream gained a permanent haze about any bodily details other than his own. And where the sound of his own breathing and the occasional grunts and moans of the woman beneath him had been the only sound before, there was a low rumbling...not rumbling...purring?

His thrusts were being met by the woman below him now, her hands milking her overripe, jutting breasts and her too-long tongue lolling out of her mouth and swinging in random directions, and the woman behind him had him in a lip lock, both tongues dueling for the upper hand, her breasts leaking copious amounts of whatever it was they were producing down his back. Both his hands were busy, his right gently rolling the clitoris of the woman in front of him and his left doing the same to the one behind.

It was about this time that the front of the nazzadi woman disappeared and the upper half of a torso appeared out of thin air in front of him: this time something appeared that was neither human nor nazzadi.

She might have been breathtakingly beautiful, or she might have been too alien to think about having sex with. It had originally come into being looking something like an anatomical model: all sinew and muscle, unappealing, if not an outright boner-killer. It quickly formed into something else. It formed ruby-red skin, two slightly-too-big breasts, and had the start of a face: a button nose and mouth were visible, and two eyes began to take shape; its head was crowned with a mass of long, thin tentacles, each wriggling of their own accord and hanging down past her breasts. The rest of the body was toned, fit, and still more feminine than either wet dream it had deigned to let him warm up against.

As it was, Mark Tanner had put two and something two-shaped together and was reasonably sure of something that looked vaguely like four.

Whatever was in front of him was what was controlling his dream. Whatever was in front of him was female. Whatever was in front of him...was a sexual deviant on a grand scale. It finally opened its eyes. Inhuman, pupil-less black crystal seemed to look at him.

And it was then that he woke up.

Which was even more disconcerting when the only difference was that the forms that he had been fucking until that point turned out to be of same kind that just came into being in front of him: their legs were rooted to the floor.

The waist that was sticking out of the wall sank and met the waist sticking into the wall, which turned around to meet it in a sight that might have worried physicians if the being it belonged to were fully human. She withdrew him from her hungrily sucking pussy, his interface with his Engel noting a hint of regret, but also...a desire for formality?

Gwendolyn had been communing with him in his sleep?

The thing behind him and the thing in front of him both pushed and pulled and set him into laying back into a woman that had become fully two or three feet taller than he was, with his head resting between two gargantuan breasts. The woman on top was closer to normal human height; but wherever her body came into contact with the giant below them, the skin fused before letting go. They eventually settled to the point where the smaller one straddled his midsection, he laying parallel to the giant, with the giant's

hands cupping the delicious, hemispherical rear of the small one. The small one, unblinking, began to sweetly kiss at his face, favoring his mouth; the giant was kissing he top of his head over and over, and clearly in no hurry.

And then he heard it. "Mine." A word. Not an emotion or a feeling or a concept. Language.

"Love."

He was suddenly taken aback. The alien face above him did not change expression in the least, but strange, translucent black tears dripped from its-no, he corrected himself, \*her\*- eyes. "Mine. Mine. Mine. Love. Protect. Yours. Love. Protect." Her hair fell around her face, creating a blinder that blocked off everything but her pretty face. Mark was starting to not care about that.

He shakily reached a hand up...and cupped her face. This time, the face changed: from an expressionless, red porcelain mask, to recognizable shock, then happiness. "Accepted. Accepted. Mine. Yours." He caught a fleeting hint of embarrassment over his telepathic link...apparently, she'd forgot to give her face tendons.

For a moment, she looked (and felt) unsure and distant, until shyly smiling and transmitting something unprecedented.

"You are mine. I am yours. You will be mine. I will be yours."

Dolphins and chimpanzees both have language. It's a proven fact that they can relay and understand messages, but they never talked about anything other than what had already happened. Gwendolyn blew them all away. She'd just used tense. Planning.

She might qualify as truly sapient.

Unknown to all but a handful worldwide, the Engel Uplift Program had just borne fruit. It seemed that good old Occam's Razor had come to the rescue again: simple, prolonged exposure to the mortal mind had caused the Engel to imprint and absorb modes of thought, essentially overwriting the genderless beast's normal docility/hostility personality. The interesting part was that it appeared to be an aggregate, not of its pilots' minds, but of what they'd expected and wanted...in a mate.

That it had learned language was icing on the cake. That it had turned sapient, well, it was going to be a

legal root canal.

Both pilot Mark Tanner and Seraph Gwendolyn would have to be closely monitored and guarded, both from those who feared the common Engel's natural temperament of bloodthirsty savagery, and from those who could use this massive leap in progress to destroy humanity by simply mimicking the Mi-Go's thievery and usurpation of the D-engine technology. But, as it stood, the two lovebirds deserved some time alone.

And besides, her pilot-acquired fetishes hadn't been that bad.

With both her mass of head-tentacles around his head, and her arms around his shoulders, she pulled him into a crushing hug and thought-annihilating kiss, before slamming her hips down on his shaft. He winced at the phantom pain over their connection, shocked. That feeling was only reserved for battle, unless-oh dear. Her snatch was lightly bleeding. He stared in awe at her starless, now teary depths, and didn't bother with words to convey his meaning. He gently kissed her lips, sending her feelings of being humbled and honored. She sent him a feeling of having claimed her stake "properly".

And insofar as it is possible for black eyes to gleam, she told him she'd already gotten over the pain, and that he'd better be ready for the main event. He answered with a quick pull and thrust, causing her pot to squelch noisily. He felt her surprise over their bond, followed by something that roughly translated to "naughty boy". He was surprised when two wide, fleshy strips across his thighs and stomach immobilized his hips.

She was moaning wonderfully while bouncing on his lap while he occasionally ground his hips into her pelvis, her groaning ensured that her entrance was very much like a human's, love button and all. He tweaked her ripe-to-bursting breasts with his hands, her odd milk spurting from her breasts in thin streams while they kissed, her tongue nearly cocooning his own in his mouth. The giant Gwendolyn they lay on top of had a look of serene happiness, sometimes biting her lip with not-quite-teeth when Mark accidentally hit her clit with his leg or foot.

She put a breast to his face, him again obligingly sucking her dark red, engorged teat while she rammed herself up and down on his dick. She let out a pleased moan and held his head to her slowly-expanding breast. When he caught the nipple in his molars and twisted, she gave a delightful shriek, and when his teeth rolled it and he flicked it with his tongue, her moaning became continual and slightly louder. When that one was empty, at about the same time the breast matched the size of his head, she switched breasts, and Mark decided to experiment. He caught her nipple between his teeth, began rubbing it with his

tongue... and slowly worked his tongue into it, forcing the nipple wider. He felt her surprise at what he was attempting, but she was letting her body be sculpted. Once her teat was a half-inch in diameter, he surprised her again, thrusting his tongue into the hole and wriggling it around inside her nipple. She screamed in pleasure, and he felt her swoon for a split-second over their bond. More of her milk flooded his mouth as he swept his tongue around what would have normally been an exit, first clockwise, then counter, then again. She yelped every time he changed direction.

She forcibly removed his mouth from her breast, now within their original slightly-too-big range. "Mine." She began kissing him on the mouth, over and over, her tongue never fully leaving his mouth. "Mine." She began to slowly raise and lower herself again, this time with a slow, constant increase in speed. "Mine." She began to psychically assault him, letting her feelings flood their link. "Mine!" She started with extreme possessiveness and protectiveness, what she'd do to any woman he became too familiar with, and a promise that she'd never hurt him. Just lock him inside of herself, in a constant sexual embrace. "Mine! MY love! Mine!" Her strange tears began flowing freely now, still constantly kissing him, her tongue never completely leaving his, her hips a blur of motion, which he began meeting: she had just released his hips. At the same time, Mark noticed some dissonance between what his eyes saw and what the Engel was projecting as self-image: before his eyes, a beautiful but strange woman was riding him as hard as she could, but the mental image that Gwendolyn was leaking was that of a small girl, breasts grotesquely huge on her small form, with her abdomen distended by his cock. He realized what he was seeing: a possessive tantrum; she told him she loved him and hadn't gotten a response. That in mind, he acted quickly to soothe her. And finally give them both some relief. In his mind he saw a young boy give a chaste kiss to a young girl with obscenely large sex organs. In physical action, he held her head to his, kissed her as hard as he could, and slammed himself into her with all the force he could muster. And he told her "I love you, too."

Oddly, it was numbers one and three that caused her to scream in ecstasy.

They came, Gwendolyn's keening echoed inside the cockpit, both her forms arched, and both to an extent that would have killed anything with a skeletal structure. While promising himself he'd hear it again, the whole room shook for a moment. To the outside observer, it would have appeared the Seraph shook itself. To Mark, the walls seemed to close in, momentarily, while a hundred faces (and a few odd legs, arms and parts of torso) looked on with adoration and ecstasy in their alien eyes. It seemed...there was a waiting list. For him. "All me. Yours."

5 hours and 10 orgasms each later (thanks to Gwendolyn's nutritious "milk" and empathic feedback), Mark Tanner reported for briefing. Of surprise to all, it appeared the Rapine Storm were making themselves such a nuisance to the bugs that the Mi-Go needed to call off attacking to reinforce other

borders. When called for mess, Mr. Tanner are sparingly and decided to turn in early, claiming to not have received much rest earlier in the day.

Mark thought about the rest of the army: so many wives, husbands, girlfriends and boyfriends away from everyone they loved. And he thought of how mangled his grammar would have to be to describe his new love life. All of her loved him, he had all the women he could ever want, and loved every one of her.

When he got back to his Seraph, he'd brought along a small cardboard sign. When he thought the meaning to Gwendolyn, she gave a small trill of amusement and excitement.

"Do Not Disturb".